DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 287 627 RC 016 351

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TITLE To Reorganize or Not Reorganize: A Study of Choice in a Small District.
INSTITUTION State Univ. of New York, Ithaca. Coll. of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell Univ.
SPONS AGENCY New York State Legislature, Albany.
PUB DATE Aug 86
NOTE 80p.; For other reports in this series, see ED 276 548, ED 281 694, and RC 016 346-358.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Comparative Analysis; Consolidated Schools; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Institutional Characteristics; *Rural Education; Rural Schools; School Community Relationship; School District Autonomy; *School District Reorganization; School District Size; Shared Resources and Services; *Small Schools
IDENTIFIERS *New York; Small School Districts

ABSTRACT

This case study examines a small school district (called Hamlet) in New York State which appears to be a perfect candidate for school reorganization because of low (and decreasing) enrollment (187 pupils in grades K-12), very high per pupil expenditures, two larger (520-610 pupils) neighboring districts to which pupils could be transported with minimal increase in average travel time, and some services already shared with both districts. The first section describes the Hamlet district as it currently exists: the community, school administration, faculty, guidance services, school board, students, transportation, academic program, special education, computer program, achievement test results, extracurricular activities, and students' future educational goals. The second section considers reorganization options and programmatic, personnel, social, and financial benefits that could result from consolidation. The third section discusses reasons for rejecting reorganization including the community's desire to maintain free lunch, senior trip, and winter ski programs. The fourth section studies the neighboring reorganized districts and the lingering feelings of distrust and betrayal held by some residents. The summary section concludes that although there is no doubt that Hamlet students would benefit academically and socially, reorganization should proceed only if strong community support exists. (NEC)

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To Reorganize or Not Reorganize: A Study of Choice in a Small District

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Organizational Alternatives for Small-Rural Schools
In New York State*

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August 1986

*A research project funded by the New York State Legislature (through an appropriation made available to the State Education Department) and the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station under provisions of the Hatch Act. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect official positions of the funding sources.

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This is the story of Hamlet, a very small school district in the southern section of the Adirondack Park. It appears to be a perfect candidate for reorganization: it has a low (and decreasing) enrollment (187 pupils K-12), very high per pupil expenditures, and two larger (520-610 pupils) neighboring districts to which Hamlet pupils could be transported with a minimal increase in average travel time. Also, Hamlet already shares some services with both districts and is currently considering sharing some others.

At the present time, however, a reasonable case could be made for Hamlet residents rejecting reorganization: local taxpayers are not overly burdened, and there are some programs and services that might not be possible in a larger school system. Moreover, Hamlet residents have had the opportunity to observe the reorganization of three nearby districts similar to Hamlet in size, geography and wealth, and what the Hamlet residents saw (and still see) was a very fractious and unhappy school district, a situation they want no part of.

This case study will examine the situation in Hamlet and weigh the advantages and disadvantages of reorganization. As the disadvantages are discussed, a case study-within-a-case study describing the experience of the neighboring reorganized district will be presented.

The report will be divided into five sections. The first will describe the Hamlet district as it currently exists; the second will examine the reorganization options and the benefits

Hamlet students might expect to receive. The third section discusses the reasons for rejecting reorganization followed by a separate section describing the neighboring reorganized district. In the final section conclusions will be drawn as to the merits of reorganization for Hamlet.

The Hamlet Central School District: 1986

The Community

The region Hamlet Central School District is located in was settled in the early 1800's, mostly by Irish pilgrims. The town's claim-to-fame is that it is the town in which Theodore Roosevelt became president. Roosevelt was hiking in the area when William McKinley was assassinated. A plaque commemorates the occasion at a spot along the local highway.

The Hamlet school district is almost coterminous with the town of Hamlet; it overlaps slightly with one other town. Within Hamlet there are two villages, Hamlet and Shakerville. These villages are about three miles apart, Hamlet being to the north. The population of the district is concentrated in these two villages. Both villages have their own post offices, and the school is in Shakerville.

The rest of the district outside the two villages is spectacular. Hamlet is located just south of the "High Peaks" region of the Adirondacks, and the view from Hamlet of Mount Marcy, Whiteface Mountain, etc., is actually better than it is

from among the peaks. There are numerous lakes and streams throughout the district which provide excellent recreational activities for the residents.

The two villages are located in the southern portion of the district and are isolated by forest from neighboring communities. There are nine miles of forest between Shakerville and the nearest village to the east, and approximately eight miles of forest between Shakerville and Southwest Central to the south. To the west is mountainous terrain, and there is no westerly route out of Shakerville. North of the village of Hamlet, another village is about 20 miles away; there is absolutely nothing but trees between the two. There are several private compounds owned by wealthy families such as the DuPonts in this area; these are well off the road and cover many thousands of acres. The State also owns property in this area.

Because Hamlet is located in the Adirondack Park it falls under the jurisdiction of the Adirondack Park Agency (APA). The APA tightly controls the development of properties in the Park. As a result the industrial base in Hamlet is limited. There is a small grocery store, a restaurant, and a couple of bars. There are several mines in the surrounding region that used to employ Hamlet residents; the mines have severely reduced their operations over the past five to eight years, as has the logging industry. According to the superintendent of schools, many of the parents commute to Slipperville for employment, traveling

close to one hour each way. The town and state government employ 25% of the adult work force, mostly for road work.

Unemployment in Hamlet is high. According to the 1980 census, there were approximately 360 persons in the district between the ages of 19 and 59; in 1979, there were 74 (21%) individuals who were unemployed at least three months.

As a result of the industrial base and the vast forest land in Hamlet the wealth picture is mixed. While having one of the lowest per pupil incomes in the State ($15,795 in 1984) the district has one of the highest per pupil property wealth ratios. There is over $205,000 worth of property behind each pupil. This large tax base allows the district to keep its tax rate 40% below the statewide average while spending almost 30% more per pupil than average.

Hamlet came close to suffering a financial disaster this year. Northern Mineral Industries (NM), one of Hamlet's major taxpayers, was suing the school district to receive a reduction in taxes. NM, a mining company, owned railroad tracks that ran through the northern area of Hamlet and had been assessed at approximately $206,000. NM's original claim in court was that the railroad was not being used and therefore NM ought not to pay such high property taxes. During the research on the case it was discovered that the federal government had seized the property under national emergency laws during World War II. After the war, control of the railroad and mines (located in a neighboring district) reverted to NM, legal title to the property remained

with the federal government, and federal property is not taxable. As ownership of the property became clear, the Hamlet School Board and superintendent braced themselves for a huge loss of tax base and the possibility that they would have to pay a substantial amount of money (the figure being discussed was $500,000) back to NM. This past spring the case was settled with Hamlet both winning and losing: the district does not have to pay back any money to the mining company, but will not be able to collect any future taxes on the property. The effect on the tax rate from this decision would have been an increase of between 25-30% if the district could not come up with the tax base somewhere else.

Fortunately for the local taxpayers another court decision resulted in transferring the tax burden carried by NM to the State. Three years ago, a court case involving a town in the Catskills resulted in more local control over the assessment of state-owned property. Even though the law had always stated that local assessors had the authority to set the value of state property, the traditional practice had been for the State Equalization and Assessment Board to determine the value of State property with the local assessor's only role being to check boundary lines. The court ruling reaffirmed the local assessor's right to set the value of State property.

The State owns thousands of acres in Hamlet and this ruling permitted recovery of the losses from the NM case. The State property assessment was raised from $486,552 to $769,948, an

increase that more than offset the $206,840 loss from NM. Thus the possible necessity of a 25-30% tax increase was largely avoided, and the overall financial base of the district remains virtually unchanged.

The community is not a very educated one. According to the 1980 census, 38% of the Hamlet residents age 18 or over have not graduated high school; another 35% finished high school but went no further. 16% attended college for one, two, or three years. Only 10% of the Hamlet residents have four or more years of a college education.

There are several community organizations in Hamlet. There is a volunteer fire department and a volunteer rescue squad, both of whom sponsor social activities for fund raising purposes. Some men from Hamlet are members of the Chamber of Commerce in a nearby town; the group holds their meetings at a restaurant convenient to Hamlet.

The town of Hamlet sponsors several sporting activities for the residents. Merchants sponsor softball teams in the summer for both children and adults. In the winter, the youth commission sponsor a very popular ski program for youngsters at a nearby ski resort.

There are two small weekly newspapers which cover the Hamlet area. Both are published out of neighboring towns and focus more on the district's school rather than Hamlet's. For daily news Hamlet residents must rely on Slipperville or Albany newspapers.

Our respondents asserted that there are two prevalent leisure time activities in Hamlet: watching television and drinking. According to one student; all the students do is...

> Stay home and watch movies, VCR movies. That's it. End of excitement. We hang out at the beach, hang out at the corners, go to other people's houses and have parties... There's no movie theater, there's no - in the winter they have a skating rink but that's mostly for the little kids. There's really nothing to do except in the summer when you go to the beach and then they just have a massive party.

Several teachers agree with this assessment:

> That's the community social life, in the pubs, and that's where the kids grow up from a very early age, that's what they do to have a good time, you go out drinking.

> A lot of these homes do not get magazines, they do not get newspapers, and I doubt very much they ever see a parent sit down and read a book... it is important [according to this teacher] that you listen to good TV, not just garbage half hour shows.

The school provides some alternative leisure activities for the community. School events, such as athletic competitions, concerts, and fund-raising dinners are very well-attended.[1] The district runs an adult education program, offering courses like cooking, volleyball, etc., to the residents at no charge. Also, the school building and grounds are available to any community group that wants to use them, again without charge.

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[1]For example, Hamlet's soccer team played for the sectional title last fall. A full spectator bus traveled 20 miles to the game from Hamlet, and the parking lot there was full of cars from Hamlet.

There are not a great many issues that divide the community politically. Elections for town offices are often decided along party lines:

> They take politics serious between Democrats and Republicans. Now when I came they were heavy on Democrats and now they crossed the line and the Supervisor now is a Republican, but basically the town was split 50-50, within one or two of the votes. So half the town is one party and half is the other and they take it real serious.

If more Democrats vote, a Democrat wins; if more Republicans vote, the Republican wins. There was, however, one example given by a Hamlet resident of a "hot political issue":

> The budget had gone to some astronomical amount for such a small place and no one came to the hearings; but there was a dog ordinance, a leash law, and I have never seen so many people in a town meeting, which I thought was a terrible reflection on what people felt was important. The dogs got them stirred up, but they could care less about the budget.

The leash law was defeated.

The School System

The Hamlet Central School District was formed in 1925. The component districts included one union free district and three common schools. Another Hamlet common school was annexed in 1944.

The main school building at Hamlet was constructed in 1935 as a K-12 school. One wing containing the cafeteria was added in 1960, and another wing housing K-3 was added five years later.

The main building has two floors and a basement. The top floor houses the high school (7-12), the computer room, guidance office and student lockers. The first floor has the auditorium/gymnasium, school and superintendent offices, the Resource Room, and 4th, 5th, and 6th grade classrooms. The nurse's office and athletic director's office are also on the first floor. The cafeteria addition was at the first floor level and upon entering the school it is difficult to distinguish between the main building and the annex. The basement houses the industrial arts classrooms, the music room, an art classroom (currently not in use), the psychologist's office and storage areas. The K-3 wing is located on the lower level also, but separate from the main basement area. It is above ground with full-sized windows.

The classrooms within the school are of adequate size; the elementary classrooms are actually quite spacious and have thick rugs in one corner for the children to play or read on. The high school has fully equipped home economics and science classrooms, and the computer room has 8 Apple (or Apple compatible) computers.

Some quarters appear to be cramped. For example, the auditorium/gymnasium is small for the amount of use it gets. Scheduling must balance the needs of boys' sports, girls' sports, music programs and plays. The cafeteria tables fold up neatly so that room is used for some activities such as cheerleading practice.

The building faces south on the main east-west road through the village. In front of the school is a circular drive and a fairly large front lawn. To the east are some woods. Behind the school are playing fields bounded by more woods. On the west side of the school there is a playground with swings, slides, etc., and two fenced-in tennis courts. Beyond the tennis courts and up a hill there is a four-bay bus garage, built in 1960.

Administration

There have been only five superintendents in the 61-year history of Hamlet Central; two men account for 41 of those years.

The current superintendent was hired two years ago. His background is atypical of a new superintendent in a small rural school. He worked previously with the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, DC and as a private educational consultant. He has published books and pamphlets and is an avid reader. He is 50 years old and this is his first superintendency.

The superintendent has a complex relationship with the local BOCES. On the one hand he likes the idea of a regional service center, he respects the District Superintendent, and admits the BOCES provides some valuable services to Hamlet (for example, a school pshychologist, a part-time music teacher, special education programs, and opportunities to meet with other administrators in his region). On the other hand, BOCES can be a potential threat to a small school like Hamlet, in that the

occupational center is competing with the schools for students. The BOCES center is in Slipperville, an hour's bus ride away. That makes it difficult for students to take all their required courses in their home school in the afternoon when they return from BOCES. Implementation of the Regents Action Plan will make that more difficult, and in Hamlet's case at least, might force the district to overhaul completely its high school schedule, including the number of class periods in a day. BOCES has contemplated keeping students all day and giving them their required courses; the superintendent pointed out that that would leave him with high school English and social studies classes with six or seven students in them. He suggested that BOCES offer more programs at satellite schools, such as the Office Procedures program that used to be offered in a nearby district. The superintendent sees the possibility that BOCES would not want to do that because it would cut down on the enrollment at the BOCES center in Slipperville. He thinks that BOCES, at least in this area, has become...

> ...the center of the service organization in competition with the centers the service organization was set up to serve.

The Faculty

There are 23 full-time teachers employed at Hamlet. They seem to be either very experienced or brand new; that is, they have either more than ten years or less than three years experience in the district. Teachers either like the area and stay or leave as soon as possible. According to the athletic

director, young teachers come to Hamlet and "put in a year or two and they just don't fit into this type of community." A long-time teacher in a neighboring district offered this overview as to why teachers leave the area:

> Well, they expect they're going to come in and get a student who is a Regents biology-social studies-math student, and in that class they're going to get anywhere from the Regents student that they thought they were going to get to a person who might be under Committee on the Handicapped in the same group. And you can't, you know, if you're just going to teach this group, the upper group, you're going to have some difficulty with this one at the lower end, and on the other hand, if you tend to work with just the lower end...So what you've got to do is, you're going to have to spend some time whether before school, after school, free periods--whenever you want--when that time is to work with some of those students who want to go on, and those types of things. And I think a lot of the people who are applying for jobs, or that we see, came out of schools--high schools--where they were in a track, and once they got here, they just couldn't handle it. And we've had some real difficulties. The difficulty that you tend to have is not that they don't know the material, but just the fact that they just can't deal with the students.

The teacher recruitment process in Hamlet is similar to that used by other districts in the area; positions are advertised in the state colleges and other teacher-preparation institutions such as the College of Saint Rose in Albany. BOCES also distributes a list of openings. Hamlet has in the past received enough applications for openings, but not from the type of teachers the superintendent wants: those with dual (at least) certification. Hamlet needs teachers for subjects such as art,

French, and home economics only part-time. To fit into the academic program teachers in these areas must have a second teaching specialty. The superintendent was fortunate to find a dual-certified French-high school English teacher two years ago, but she has moved on to a position at BOCES and, at this writing, he has been unable to replace her. He could not find a person dual-certified in art and another area; as a result there is no high school art program, and art in the elementary grades is the responsibility of the regular classroom teachers.

The superintendent is very concerned about the staffing situation for 1986-87; he has, in his own words, "not received many resumes," and may not be able to hire the staff he wants. He is still seeking candidates while exploring other staffing arrangements, such as sharing a teacher with a neighboring district or contracting one through BOCES.

The teaching experience itself varies according to the grade level involved, grades kindergarten through third are considered the elementary grades; their classrooms are located in their own wing of the school.

At this level the classes are primarily self-contained so the teachers do not have a great deal of contact with each other during the day. The students have outside instructors for physical education and music, so the elementary teachers do have regular contact with the physical education and music teachers. The time the students are out of the room with these people serves as a break time or preparation period for the teacher.

There is a specialist who works with some of the students and a resource room teacher with whom the mainstreamed special education students spend part of the day. The elementary teacher has to coordinate with these teachers for some of the students' programs. Thus even though the classrooms are basically self-contained, the teachers have contact with at least four other teachers during the day.

Hamlet has combined fourth through sixth grades with teaching responsibilities spread over 2.1 teachers. There are two classrooms, one serving as a homeroom for fourth grade and the other as homeroom for fifth and sixth grades combined. A great deal of cooperation among the teachers is necessary throughout the day. Also, like the elementary teachers, these teachers must coordinate with the physical education, music and resource room teachers as well.

The high school day at Hamlet is broken up into nine periods. High school teachers teach six or seven periods per day, with perhaps another period or two spent supervising study hall or homeroom. There is primarily one teacher per subject area, with perhaps one other teacher teaching one level of a subject. For example, eighth grade science is taught by one of the physical education teachers, while 7th, 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades are taught by the certified science teacher. In English, there are two half-time English teachers who each teach three grade levels; they work together to coordinate the program at the different grade levels. There is only one section of any

given course, so in no instances are there two teachers teaching the same course. The teacher, for example, of English 10 knows that all the students in her class had the same English 9 teacher, and the English 9 teacher was either herself of one other person. The teachers know what is happening in the entire 7-12 program for their subject area, not just the particular grade levels they are teaching.

Teachers at all grade levels are (or have been) involved with extracurricular activities. Two of the elementary teachers, for example, supervised the 1985-86 yearbook staff. One of the 4th-6th grades teachers used to coach sports, but does not any more, and all of the high school teachers report that they are (or have been) extracurricular advisors. Both physical education teachers coach one sport per season, usually both junior varsity and varsity squads. There is extra financial compensation in most cases for serving as advisors, coaches and chaperons.

None of the teachers have to serve as hall or lunch room monitors. The teachers attribute that to the size of the school; with so few students, control is not a problem and is dealt with by individual teachers when situations arise. If a student is wandering around the hall someone will notice and send the student back to class. There is only one sitting for lunch each day, and most of the faculty eat in the lunch room at a table in the corner. If a disturbance breaks out, there are enough teachers to handle it without having someone specifically assigned to patrol the cafeteria.

There is no faculty lounge to speak of at Hamlet. Several years ago the room that was used for that purpose became the computer lab. There is a small room on the ground floor that has a copying (ditto) machine, a couple of chairs, and some books and manuals. That is technically the teachers' lounge, although the teachers do not really consider it as such. When asked about having a lounge, the teachers responded that although it would be nice it is not necessary; the computer lab is more important.

Overall, the major difference for teachers at different grade levels is how many different groups of students they see during the day. The first grade teacher, for example, would see one group, the 5/6 teacher would see three, and a high school teacher might see seven or eight. All have some preparation time, and all can or do participate as extracurricular advisors.

The teachers see several advantages to teaching at Hamlet. The most often-cited is the ability to get to know the students well. In the words of one teacher:

> Most of the kids, you know them very well. You know when not to get on their backs, you know their families, you know when things aren't going very well at home, you also know how to make them work. You know when to give them a hard time.

At Hamlet there is one teacher per grade in the elementary school and one per subject area in the high school; teachers see both positive and negative aspects to this situation:

> I'm kind of on my own, really. I do things on my own, like if I want to do a bulletin board...I'm really glad about this place

> because I'm able to experience anything I want. (from a first grade teacher)
>
> In social studies, for example, the student comes in at the seventh grade level, they are going to have that social studies teacher until that teacher either leaves or until the day they graduate and that, I say, is a disadvantage because they don't see the fluctuation, or they don't see the variety there. (from a high school teacher)

Another high school teacher pointed out that it is bad for her as a teacher to be the only science teacher.

> I don't have anyone to talk to, to say "How do I approach this?"

Also, one teacher cannot offer a variety of electives in a given field. In industrial arts, for example:

> If I had another technology teacher here, I could teach nine or ten different subject matters or areas of technology...I have to go to an every-other-year basis, and offer photography every other year, offer advanced woodworking every other year, mechanical drawing every other year, electronics every other year. You know, we have that type of a standoff going back and forth. English, the business classes, everything, every subject area goes into that kind of a pattern.

Though the teachers are in general positive about their school, there are some problem areas; space is one example. The remedial reading teacher does not have her own room; she uses a corner of the first grade classroom. Also, the gymnasium is too small for all the activities that take place there. In winter, two boys' basketball teams, two girls' basketball teams, and the two cheerleading squads all need to practice after school. The girls often wind up in elementary classrooms or the cafeteria.

The teachers would like to see more of a variety of courses offered. They do, however, realize the constraints operating in the district in this regard. The one area they feel something needs to be done is art: currently there is no art program at all in the district.

The teachers also pointed out some of the disadvantages and advantages for the students. The disadvantage most often pointed out is the lack of experience available to the students, both social and cultural:

> The kids don't get to meet other people. Like this class, first grade--they're going to be second grade, third grade, fourth grade--they are going to move up through the school all together...as far as dating and stuff like that, these kids have known each other since forever!
>
> They don't get out and do things, like they don't go to the operas, they don't--their cultural experience is limited.

The advantage for the students, according to the teachers, is that the students can participate in a lot of activities, to a point where they could become overextended. Several teachers pointed this out:

> From my point of view the kids get to do a lot more here. The average kids can do all of the things here. They will be on the sports teams. They will be on the yearbook. They will be in the plays. They will be in the band. They will be in the chorus. They are in everything. (from the high school science teacher)
>
> You have those who do nothing, but we will say that the average student in this type of school would be overextended in their extracurricular activities. Now they learn responsibility and they learn to use their

> time wisely, but they really have too much going on. This affects their average somewhat. (from the guidance counselor)
>
> But I still say it's good for them, though. 'Cause they'll be just out doing nothing anyway. I think it's giving them organization. (from the physical education teacher)

Overall, the teachers see some problems in the school, but the overall tone is positive.

Guidance Services

A Hamlet teacher who is dual-certified in guidance and social studies serves as the guidance counselor. He has four periods a day free for this task. His duties include supervising testing in the schools (Regents, SAT's, etc.) and filing reports to the State Education Department, as well as counseling students.

Not many college recruiters visit Hamlet Central. A few from small, North Country colleges such as St. Lawrence send someone down to the school, but for the most part, Hamlet students visit the colleges. The guidance counselor himself has taken students to college presentations at SUNY ATC Canton, and has driven them around to see other colleges in the area. He encourages the students to look for programs in smaller colleges; he sees the transition from 10-12 students per class to perhaps 150 students per class in a large college as troublesome for Hamlet students. In the guidance counselor's words:

> Well, the town and the school being small, we try not to have them go to large schools. Now if they insist on going to a place as large as Albany State we let them go after consulting with their parents that there are 15,000 or more students. It's really too big for most students to handle the first year. We try to steer them into a smaller four-year or two-year school that would be smaller by nature. They do not function well going to a large school of 15-20,000. They just are used to 10 or 12 in a class, sometimes less, and when they get in those big schools with 100 or 200 in a class they are lost. They can't talk to the teacher and it's very hard.... I would try to get a similar program that they wanted in a smaller school and say, "Well, it's your choice," but I would prefer that they start at a smaller school and then either transfer, graduate, or go on from there.

No local industries recruit at Hamlet Central. Several businesses, however, recruit the technically trained students through BOCES.

The different branches of the United States Military Services visit Hamlet once a year to make a presentation. Approximately one student per graduating class enlists in the military (that includes part-time service in the National Guard).

The School Board

Hamlet has a five member School Board. The current Board President is a dentist who moved into the area several years ago. Of the other members, one works for the town of Hamlet, one teaches in a neighboring school district, one is the local fire chief, and the fifth member is a minor official at a bank in the next town. Three members (the dentist, the teacher, the bank

official) have college degrees or beyond; three (the dentist, the town worker, the fire chief) are men, and two (the teacher, the bank official) are women.

Board members are elected to five year terms; one term expires every year. There is usually just one candidate, and if that person is not the incumbent, it is more than likely someone the Board sought out and asked to run.

Two years ago there was almost a contest for a Board seat. The dentist wanted to resign. A man described as a "young hot head" was going to run for the dentist's seat. Believing that having this person on the Board would not be in the best interests of the school, the dentist decided to seek reelection after all; the other man dropped out of the race, respecting the almost unbroken tradition of not challenging incumbents for their Board seats.

There has been one instance in the recent history of the district where an incumbent did lose an election. The woman who was elected over the incumbent was the daughter of the long-time town supervisor, a very powerful man in town politics; the Board President believes it was his influence that carried the vote for her.

This year the daughter of the town supervisor was challenged for her seat on the Board by the "young hot head;" this time he fought to the finish, forcing the incumbent to campaign hard to keep her seat. Two hundred fifty-eight people voted in the

election, the largest turnout anyone in Hamlet could remember. The incumbent won by about fifty votes.

Aside from these occasional election challenges, there is little controversy surrounding the School Board in Hamlet. Members rarely receive phone calls or complaints from parents or community members; those they do get are complaints about discipline that are referred to the superintendent. There have been no budget defeats over the past five years, and there is some question as to whether there has ever been a budget defeat. This year the budget passed easily with a 3% tax increase, while last year the Board asked for a budget that included a 14.9% tax increase; they had to cover the cost of the new State fire code implementation, a new bus, an extra half-time teacher, and some computers. Prior to that (under the former superintendent) taxes had been <u>decreased</u> twice. During those two years no major improvements were made to the school, and the current superintendent felt he needed a 14.9% increase to meet postponed needs.

The Students

Hamlet students are close to their classmates, which is important in a school where the class size is so small. In the words of two students:

> You learn to be tolerant, you really get used to it.
>
> You have to make friends, you have to make do. You really don't have a choice. You have to realize that you're going to have to

be with these people, so you have to get along.

The students also appreciate their teachers, and the extra effort the teachers make for the students:

> The teachers really go out of their way. If kids are failing, it's really because they don't want it at all. The teachers have their time after school, "I'm going to be here if you want." So they make time.

Most of the students are involved in extracurricular activities. By participating in sports and clubs, on the honor roll, working as an aide, or being in band or chorus, students earn points toward a "Block M," a school letter presented at a banquet at the end of each year. To get enough points for a Block M, students have to participate in two or three activities per year. Approximately 60% of the students have Block M's by graduation.

Among the other good things students see in their school:

--free lunch programs

--up-to-date computer program

--the annual senior trip

--lack of drugs and violence in the school

--clean building

--students who live close to school can ride on school bus

Some of the good things the students see in their school have their down-sides as well. The students point to closeness as good, but as one student said:

> Everybody knows everything about everybody: your background, your parents' background, your grandparents' background, everything! You can't keep a secret in Hamlet.

The students cited above felt it was an advantage for the teachers to be available, because they were able to offer extra help. That too, according to one student, has its drawback: "the teachers catch you easily if you do something wrong."

Also, although the students are very involved with extra-curricular activities, there are other activities and equipment the students would like to see in the school:

--a football team

--swimming pool

--better sports equipment, gymnasium

--more proms and dances

--more field trips

There are a few areas relating to the academic program where students would like to see changes; they would like to see:

--a wider variety of courses

--more preparation for SATs, college

--more science equipment

--work in study and library skills

--specialized courses

Overall, the tone of the students is positive; they are proud to be part of Hamlet Central. As one student summed up her feelings about the school:

> I think when I listened to other students talk about their schools (Albany, New York City) and the problems they have in their schools, it makes me really glad that I go here.

Transportation

Hamlet Central has three bus runs each morning and afternoon. The district operates three buses with capacities of 65, 60 and 47 passengers, respectively.

Most students are picked up at or very close to their homes. In some cases, the bus cannot get to their houses and the students must travel to the bus. One student is nine miles away from the nearest bus stop. His parents are caretakers of a private retreat and the owners will not widen the road or put down gravel just for the school bus. The district contracts with this student's father to provide transportation out to the main road. Several students living at another private compound have a similar problem. The bus can get in but there is no place for it to turn around and get out. For these students, however, the trip to the bus stop is only about a mile.

The longest bus run within the district is forty-five minutes. In the morning this run begins at 6:30 a.m. and brings the students into the school at 7:15 a.m., well before the start of school. This is necessary because the driver must then bring some students to another district to catch a bus for BOCES.

Transportation to BOCES is handled cooperatively with several neighboring districts. Except for special education

students, all BOCES students get to their programs via Southwest Central.

A Hamlet bus driver makes one trip to the Southwest Central School each morning to drop off BOCES students. (In the past, this run included students from Hamlet's neighbor to the north. Those students would be dropped off at the northern most bus stop in Hamlet, brought to Hamlet Central, then to Southwest Central. This year no students from that district attend BOCES programs.) The students taking half day vocational programs in Slipperville are then bused down there with students from Southwest Central and another district. They return to Southwest Central around noon, and are bused back to Hamlet Central by 12:30 p.m. for lunch. Two Hamlet high school students are taking a BOCES-sponsored business course in the Southwest Central school; these two are picked up and brought back to Hamlet at 9:20 a.m. There are two Hamlet youngsters in a BOCES preschool program also offered at Southwest Central. These students are picked up at 2:00 p.m. and brought home. Altogether the Hamlet bus makes four trips daily to Southwest Central: one in the morning to bring students down there, and three trips throughout the day to bring them back. The actual traveling time between the two schools is about fifteen minutes.

While the longest bus ride within the district is forty-five minutes, the students in BOCES programs at Slipperville travel much longer. Some students are picked up at their house at 6:30 a.m. and arrive in Slipperville about 9:00 a.m., two and one half

hours later. The bus from Hamlet to Southwest Central to catch the BOCES bus leaves Hamlet at 7:15 a.m., so the shortest traveling time is one hour and forty-five minutes. The district has looked into the bus routes carefully, and this is the most efficient way to handle it.

The system works well for the district but there is room for little flexibility. If a bus driver is ill, substitutes are available; if a bus breaks down or is needed for a special trip the logistical arrangements can get quite complicated. An example this past fall involved the sectional soccer finals held 20 miles north of Hamlet. Hamlet was playing in the finals for the first time. Transporting the team was not a problem, but the school ran a spectator bus also. In order to do this, the pre-schoolers in the BOCES program at Southwest Central had to be picked up at noontime instead of at 2:00 p.m. and spent the afternoon in the first grade class back at Hamlet. Like many problems caused by the smallness of the school, this one was resolved because of the smallness of the school. The inflexibility of the transportation system was offset by the flexibility possible in small classes.

The Academic Program

The effect of small size is evident in Hamlet's academic program. There is only one section of each grade level from

kindergarten through third grade. Fourth, fifth and sixth grades share 2.1 FTE teachers and two classrooms.

At the junior high and high school level the program offerings are restricted, and only one section of each course is available. The program does meet State requirements, though it is lacking in the area of home economics and art. A short summary of the program follows:

English:	One section each of English 7, 8, 9 and 10; English 11 and 12 classes are divided into an 11/12 Regents and an 11/12 non-Regents. The possibility of treating English 9 and 10 in this manner is being considered.
Foreign Language:	French I, II, III and IV are offered to high school students every year.
Mathematics:	Math 7 and 8 are offered every year; in the high school the new math sequence (Course I, II and III) is offered, along with calculus and consumer math.
Science:	Every year 7th and 8th grade science are offered, along with 9th grade earth science and Regents biology. Regents chemistry and Regents physics alternate every year; non-Regents biology, non-Regents chemistry and non-Regents physics alternate every third year.
Social Studies:	The required 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th grade social studies courses are offered every year, plus an elective in Canadian studies.
Music:	A music theory course, instrumental lessons, chorus and band are available in Hamlet as regularly scheduled classes.

Art: There is currently no art program in Hamlet. The district has been seeking to hire someone dual-certified in art and another area but has been unable to do so.

Vocational: For the business students Hamlet offers: Business math, bookkeeping, advanced bookkeeping, personal business management, keyboarding and business communication. In the industrial art area, there is 7th grade industrial arts, 9th grade general shop, and three specialized shop courses that change from year-to-year. Courses offered in 1985-86 were electricity, mechanical drawing and woods. Home economics is offered in the 7th grade.

Students who want to learn a trade are encouraged to take one of the BOCES vocational programs. What is offered at Hamlet is a basic foundation; students would need more than is available in order to build a career in any of these areas.

It is difficult to evaluate Hamlet's high school course offerings relative to schools of similar size. There are only three other districts in the State that have high school enrollments within ten students of Hamlet's, and the wealth characteristics vary greatly:

District	High School Enrollment	Per Pupil Property Wealth	Per Pupil Income	#Different Courses 7-12*
A	61	207,021	24,361	61
B	71	318,484	32,924	63
Hamlet	61	204,795	15,795	55
D	58	599,839	107,556	66

* Special education is excluded.

District B, like Hamlet, is in the Adirondack Park; District A is located in the Catskills, and District D is on eastern Long Island.

At first glance it appears that Hamlet offers significantly fewer courses to its 7th-12th grade students than the other districts. Hamlet's two large trouble areas--art and home economics--account for most of the discrepancy. If the art and home economics courses are removed from the other districts' totals, the number of courses comes out quite close:

District	# Courses 7-12 (excluding art and home economics)
A	55
B	57
Hamlet	55
D	57

The effect of wealth cannot be missed here. District D, by far the wealthiest, is the smallest but offers the greatest number of courses. It is the only district that offers students both French and Spanish. District D also offers multiple sections of courses that the other districts only offer once. For example, District D offers two sections each of English 9,10,11 and 12, plus an English elective. That is nine courses for 58 students! Hamlet, on the other hand, is the poorest of these districts and offers the fewest courses.

There are, however, some areas of the curriculum where Hamlet's program stands out from these others. Unlike District D, Hamlet has the resources to offer only one section each of English 9, 10, 11 and 12; as mentioned above, Hamlet combined the 11th and 12th grade classes and divided them into 11/12 Regents

and 11/12 non-Regents, thus, in a sense, offering two sections each of English 11 and 12.

In mathematics, Hamlet is the only one of these districts to make the switch from the old algebra-geometry-math 11 program to the new Course I, II and III program. The other districts will have to adopt the new program eventually; Hamlet did so sooner rather than later.

There are three curricular areas in Hamlet that stand out in comparison to the other three districts. The first, the science program, is primarily the result of a particularly dedicated teacher; the second, special education, is a result of certain district characteristics and policies. The third, the computer program, is a combination of both a particular teacher and district administration. A description of these three programs follows.

The Science Curriculum

Hamlet offers a full range of science programs, although not every course is offered every year. There is one full-time science teacher for junior high and high school who teaches all the science courses except for 8th grade; one of the physical education teachers teaches that course.

The junior high science curriculum follows the State standards closely. Seventh grade science is a life science course; eighth grade is earth science. Both classes use textbooks and have lab experiments worked into the program. Lab

work is a problem for the 8th grade class, which is quite large by Hamlet standards: there are 21 students.

The ninth grade science course is general science. This is not a Regents course. The staff felt that ninth grade Regents, an earth science course, was too difficult for the whole class. Because they could not offer two science courses at this level they opted for a non-Regents general science. Labs again are part of the general program.

From tenth grade on the students have a choice of both Regents and non-Regents courses. They must plan carefully, however: the courses alternate from year to year. Regents biology is offered every year. This is a two period a day course, one being lecture and the other lab. Regents chemistry and physics are offered in alternate years, again with separate lectures and labs.

Non-Regents or general biology, chemistry, and physics alternate on a three year cycle. Classes are a mixture of sophomores, juniors and seniors. As in the lower level science courses, the lab work and lectures are combined in one class period.

These courses are very unusual. Two of the similarly sized districts offer general biology, but only Hamlet has general chemistry and physics; the others offer only the Regents versions. The reason for Hamlet's expanded offerings is the teacher.

When the present science teacher arrived in the district seventeen years ago, only Regents science courses were offered in biology, chemistry and physics. As a result, only about half of the students in the school took any science past ninth grade. She felt the less gifted students ought to have some exposure to less rigorous science, and developed the three general science courses. Now, all but about two or three students per graduating class take four years of science.

The science teacher encourages the students to find resources close to home. One popular science class is the pond water lab: students bring in water samples from local ponds and examine them from organisms. Students are sometimes asked to bring in samples of rocks, plants, etc. which are discussed in class.

The students also bring in animals and birds, many of which are injured or sick. The teacher and students do what they can to heal them; sometimes they are successful, sometimes they are not. Other small animals are often brought in just for the day.

There is no shortage of animals to dissect in Hamlet. The students do a lot of trapping and sell the pelts -- the carcasses often end up in the science classroom refrigerator. During hunting season, students bring in deer organs such as lungs, livers, etc. Sometimes families in the district butcher cows; the science teacher usually gets the heart and maybe some other organs. At times the science teacher has to tell the students

"no more" when the students bring in too many at once. Storage becomes a problem.

In Hamlet, all of the science classes are taught in the same room, with desks and blackboards in the front and the lab facilities in the back. There are enough lab stations for about a dozen students to work comfortably and safely. For grades 10-12, this matches the class size. It is a problem for grades 7-9, in which science is required and there is only one course each. This year, for example, there are 17 students in grade seven, 21 in grade eight, and 16 in grade nine. As a result there are more demonstration labs and seat labs than there might be if there were more lab stations or less students.

The lab facilities themselves could best be described as basic. All the fundamental instruments are available, and though old, they are well-maintained. The microscopes, for example, are 15 years old, but all are in working order because they are sent out for cleaning periodically. The science teacher is very careful with equipment and chemicals and teaches the students to be likewise. Some lab experiments call for equipment the school does not have: a certain type of glass rod, for example. The students have to figure out a way to improvise; the teacher then approves their substitute or offers advice. This, she feels, can be or more benefit to the students than having the original piece of equipment.

The science teacher in Hamlet is in regular contact with the science teacher in Southwest Central; often they share or trade

chemicals, as well as ideas for labs. Both superintendents know about this but are not involved with specifics. The teachers deal directly with each other.

An important aspect of science education in Hamlet is writing. The students must write a scientific research paper with references. The science teacher coordinates this activity with the English teacher: the former grades for substance, the latter for style. The science teacher is also very particular about lab write-ups, and has actually not passed otherwise good students because they did not complete the required number of lab reports. This, she feels, is essential if the students are to do well in college science courses; the feedback she says she gets from graduates attending (or failing out of) college supports her in this. She feels confident that if they do their work, her students are adequately prepared to do college work in science.

In this particular district, it is difficult to separate the science program from the teacher. The two most outstanding features of the science program -- the full range of non-Regents high school courses and the emphasis on writing -- were both her ideas, and both have had an impact on the availability and quality of science education in Hamlet. The program serves as an example of how a small district can offer a wide range of science courses.

Special Education

The special education program in Hamlet is very much a part of the academic program of the school. Of the 24 handicapped students, only four are in programs at BOCES; the other 20 work in regular classrooms with support from a resource room. This is possible because of the small class sizes (10-15 students) in the school.

There is one full-time special education teacher for the school. She is on the district Committee on the Handicapped (COH) but no longer serves as chairperson. There was just too much additional paperwork to contend with. As the only full-time special education professional in the district, she is responsible for resource room instruction, all the testing and screening, consultations with parents, teachers and BOCES, and all the paperwork for the State Education Department.

The resource room is on the first floor of the school. It is not very large, but has nice large windows, a desk for the teacher and several student desks. There are also some files and shelves with student folders. By law an individual resource room teacher can see 20 students at maximum; in Hamlet she sees the 20 and feels there are several more, though not legally handicapped, who might benefit from the program.

Most of the faculty at Hamlet Central are involved in the special education process. All but three teachers in the school have handicapped children in their classrooms. The students spend most of the day in their classrooms, and then a half hour

to an hour in the resource room going over the things they learned in class, preparing for tests, and doing extra drills. In a sense, the resource room teacher functions as a tutor. This requires a great deal of cooperation between the special education teacher and the classroom teacher if the program is to work effectively.

The special education teacher receives the necessary cooperation from the rest of the faculty. She feels comfortable asking teachers questions about her students and making suggestions for in-the-classroom work, and the teachers are similarly open with her.

It took a while for the parents in the district to warm up to the special education teacher. At first, the school nurse teacher, who has lived in the community for a very long time, acted as the intermediary between the special education teacher and the parents. The nurse-teacher helped obtain permission from the parents to put children in special education classes, explained the program to parents, and helped arrange meetings between parents and the special education teacher. This was necessary until the community got to know the special education teacher. Now the special education teacher is more comfortable going directly to the parents, although communication is sometimes hampered by the distance between the parents and the faculty. She feels there is a real psychological line which separates the two groups. Many of the parents have no more than a high school level education while all of the faculty have

college degrees. The special education teacher noted that there are parents she has been dealing with for five years who still call her Miss _____, even though she has asked them on numerous occasions to use her first name. She thinks this works against the children; the children whose parents are more comfortable progress further. Occasionally she gets phone calls from parents who wonder why a child came home from school upset, or who want to know something about what happened in a class. For the most part, there has been little questioning about the special education program from the parents. The teacher interprets this as trust on the part of the parents, not indifference, and tries to get the parents more involved by encouraging her students to talk about school at home. Now all except about three parents come to open houses and conferences.

As stated above, the district sends four students to BOCES for self-contained special education classes. The BOCES center is in Slipperville, which is a fair distance from Hamlet. The daily trip for these children is about one hour, fifteen minutes on as many as three different buses each way. The students are brought to Hamlet Central. some walk to school, others are bused. From there they take a bus down to Chestertown where the Southeast Central students board a bus and ride to Slipperville together. The process is reversed in the afternoon. This is one reason why the district tries to keep as many students as possible in the district instead of sending them to BOCES.

Although she is not responsible for the education of the students at BOCES, the special education teacher is involved with them. She consults with the BOCES instructors to see how the students are doing, and tries to keep these students' parents apprised of their children's progress. Her experience with the parents of her own students led her to believe that the parents of the BOCES students were very unlikely to travel to Slipperville to meet the BOCES teachers. She makes an effort to see that the parents are involved in their children's educations.

In a recent State Education Department evaluation of Hamlet, the examiner found only one problem with Hamlet's special education program: the minutes from the COH meetings contained some items they did not need and left out some items which should have been included. The examiner's overall evaluation was very positive:

> The district has every reason to be proud of their special education program and the accomplishments of students classified as having a handicapping condition. These students have been part of the musical program as members of the chorus which recently won the regional competition in Slipperville. In addition special education students are on the school's baseball team and the soccer team. The success of many of the school's activities are due in large part to students with handicapping conditions who are encouraged to participate by the Superintendent of Schools, the school nurse, and the resource room teacher.
>
> The attitude of those members of the staff who were interviewed by this Regional Associate was exemplary.

The Computer Program

In Hamlet, the Board of Education and superintendent are very committed to computer instruction in the school. Instruction is available at every grade level, with computers in many of the classrooms as well as the computer lab.

The build-up of the computer program began about five years ago. The superintendent at that time believed it was preferable for students to get a wide orientation to all types of computers. As a result the district purchased three different makes of computers: Apples, Commodores and Texas Instruments. The current superintendent and the computer coordinator believe it is more beneficial to the students to develop a more in-depth knowledge in computing on one type of machine; they chose to use Apple II's and compatible Franklins as their standard and put eight of them in the computer lab. The elementary grades received the four Texas Instruments computers because they were easy to use, and the math classroom received the Commodore PETS because the district had some math software for them. There are also Apple II/Franklins in the Main Office, the business room, and the library that are sometimes available to students. Overall, the computer: student ratio is approximately 1:10; for grades seven through twelve, it is about 1:8. More important than the ratio, however, is the fact that these machines are widely used.

In the K-3 grades there is a Texas Instruments computer in each classroom. These serve, according to the computer

coordinator, as a "supplement to the everyday educational plan." The individual teacher determines the role of the computer in the class, and that role is usually to assist in learning the alphabet, numbers and simple mathematics. There is one machine in each classroom, and the computer lab is available at certain times during the day if the teachers want to bring their whole class in. (This does not happen often at the elementary level.)

There is a required introductory computer course for the seventh grade. This course includes computer literacy, hands on interaction with the computer, and learning about different types of software. The class also does a little bit of programming in BASIC and LOGO. It is taught by the district computer coordinator, using the Apples and Franklins in the computer lab.

The only other computer class the district offers is open to high school students. This course covers basic programming, PASCAL, word processing and data base management. Approximately 75-80% of the high school students take this course, with class size averaging seven to twelve students; with eight machines available, this is an excellent computer: student ratio. High school students also have exposure to the computers in the math classroom; as in the elementary grades, these are used to supplement the regular math course material.

Both computer courses are taught by the computer coordinator, who also advises on all software purchases, staff evaluation of software, repairs, etc. Before becoming a teacher, he worked as a sales representative in an electronics store and

demonstrated and sold computer equipment, but decided he did not like retail sales. The other teachers in the school are very willing to learn about the computers and how to use them for word processing and other projects. The computer coordinator gives an in-service introductory workshop at the beginning of the school year for all teachers. The teachers' biggest concern, according to the computer coordinator, is "time to learn"; most teachers are occupied by classes and/or study halls seven to eight periods a day and supervise extracurricular activities after school. The teachers are willing, the equipment is available, but time is short.

The computer coordinator estimates that 30-40% of the high school students have home computers. These are mostly Radio Shack computers, Commodores or Texas Instruments. The students want to learn computer programming and usage, and the district supports their desire. The computer coordinator feels that the district has set a high standard; every student in the school gets exposure and access to a computer, and their interest (and their parents' interest) is high. There is only one basic rule limiting the use of computers in the school: no games are allowed.

The computer coordinator feels Hamlet is doing more in computer instruction than most other northern school districts; he thinks his program is about equal to that of Slipperville and other large suburban districts. In fact, his program is probably better, he says, because of the computer: student ratio, which

allows students a great deal of hands-on experience. When asked to identify the strengths of Hamlet Central School District, the students, teachers and community members cite the computer program as the strongest academic program at Hamlet.

Overall, Hamlet's academic program runs the gamut from totally lacking (art, high school home economics) to above average offerings and innovation (English, mathematics, science and computers). The superintendent is trying to address the problem areas and will probably arrange to share a home economics teacher with Southeast Central in the fall. And he will continue to search for a dual-certified art teacher.

Test Results

Following are the results of the Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) tests in Hamlet:

PUPIL EVALUATION PROGRAM:
PERCENT OF STUDENTS ABOVE STATEWIDE REFERENCE POINT

PEP Tests	Grade 3 Reading	Grade 3 Math	Grade 5 Writing	Grade 6 Reading	Grade 6 Math
Hamlet	67%	92%	100%	94%	100%
all small central schools (enroll < 1100)	87.3	89.0	88.4	87.8	87.7
total public schools	77.2	80.0	85.2	77.5	77.5
State total	78.5	80.5	85.4	78.7	78.4

REGENTS COMPETENCY TESTS:
PERCENT PASSING

Regents Competency	Jan. 84 Math	Jan. 84 Reading	Jan. 84 Writing	June 84 Math	June 84 Reading	June 84 Writing
Hamlet		100%	100%	67%*	100%	100%
small central schools	75.9	98.5	90.3	81.3	94.0	74.7
total public schools	59.1	93.2	80.3	63.0	79.7	63.3
State total	61.1	93.4	81.0	63.5	80.5	64.0

* Includes several handicapped students; if they are excluded, the passing rate is 100%.

The chart shows that with only a few exceptions the students in Hamlet compare very well with others in the state. The district is below average in only one of the five PEP areas; in the others it is well above average. In the Regents Competency tests Hamlet is above average in every category except one, and it should be noted that only four students took that test: two passed and two did not.

The scores for the 1984 Regents Examinations follow:

JUNE 1984 REGENTS EXAMS: PERCENT PASSING

	Hamlet	Central Schools < 1100 enrolled	All Public Schools	State Total
Business Math	64 (11)	78.5	75.1	75.0
Comp. English	79 (14)	87.1	85.0	86.0
Comp. French	50 (5)	92.3	91.7	91.0
Math 10	86 (7)	80.1	77.0	76.1
Math 11	57 (7)	71.3	74.4	73.0
Biology	100 (6)	77.0	73.2	73.1
Chemistry	100 (9)	77.9	79.0	78.3
Comp. Soc. Stud.	78 (9)	81.3	77.5	78.6

The results for Regents Examinations are not nearly as impressive as the results for the younger students' tests. (Though it is important to remember that the district requires all students to take the Regents exams, hence, average will be lowered.) Hamlet's scores in science, however, are outstanding, and those in mathematics are above average in two out of three subjects.

Extracurricular Activities

Hamlet offers four clubs, four musical groups, and twelve sports to its students. These are listed below, along with the approximate number of participants (out of a high school population of 61) following in parentheses:

Timberline Lit. Magazine (7)
Student Council (12)
Nat. Honor Society (4)
Business Ed. Service Org. (7)
Chorus (36)
Jazz Pop Chorus (11)
Band (33)
Stage Band (13)

Boys' soccer (19)
Girls' JV volleyball (10)
Girls' Var. volleyball (10)
Boys' JV basketball (13)
Bos' Var. Basketball (11)
Girls' JV basketball (10)
Girls' Var. basketball (10)
JV cheerleading (7)
Var. cheerleading (7)
Boys' baseball (15)
Girls' softball (12)
Boys' tennis (7)

The school also produces a yearbook and a senior play annually.

Academic eligibility requirements for participation in extracurricular activities at Hamlet are relatively new, having begun under the previous superintendent. They are in a state of flux right now. There have been three policies in three years, and the current policy is expected to be changed again soon.

The original policy put into practice two years ago allowed students to fail one course and still play sports. If the students were failing two courses, they had three weeks to get their grades up or they were off the team.

Last year the policy was made more strict. If a student was failing one they were off the team for five weeks while they supposedly worked to bring their grade up. This created all sorts of problems for Hamlet's coaches. So many students were declared inelegible that they had difficulty fielding teams.

There was another major problem with both of the above policies -- they were perceived as applying primarily to sports. Students were not prohibited from participating in other activities such as fund-raising, band, or chorus. In short, students could be kicked off the basketball team but could stand outside the door during the game selling cookies. This policy (or its uneven enforcement) angered students, coaches, and the community.

This year's eligibility policy is very loose. If a student is doing poorly, the teacher tells the coach. The coach talks to the student and perhaps sends the student for extra help instead of practice once or twice a week. If there is no improvement, parents are called in for a parent-teacher-coach conference. That is the extent of the school's authority. The responsibility to decide whether the student can participate lies solely with the parents. The teaching and coaching staff are not happy with this system at all; they have no control and do not expect any parents to exercise <u>their</u> control and remove students from teams.

The faculty would like to see yet another eligibility policy be developed. One important element would be a strict definition of extracurricular activities and what the policy applies to. They would like to see something similar to the original policy, where failing one grade would trigger probation that required the student to get extra help. Two failing grades would put the student out of activities. The faculty was even willing to devise a system where extra help would be offered in certain subjects on certain days; for example, on Monday afternoons the English teachers would be available, on Tuesdays the math teacher, etc. Students failing English would report to their English teacher for extra work on Mondays instead of going to practice. The faculty expects a policy along these lines to be developed in the near future, perhaps as soon as next year.

Each year the senior class at Hamlet goes on a major trip. Recent destinations include: London, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Mexico City and Acapulco. Preparation in the form of fund-raising actually begins in ninth grade. Students pay $10 dues in ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades; in most cases this $30 is all the students contribute directly to the trip. Most of the money is raised through fund-raising activities such as bake sales, car washes, door-to-door sales, raffles, etc. The Board of Education contributes up to $120 per student, depending on what the students raise on their own. The Board allows a total expenditure of $600 per pupil for the trip. If the trip is expected to cost more than that, students are asked to contribute

their own spending money or perhaps pay for some of their meals. For the most part, however, the community foots the bill.

The community is supportive of the big trips for the seniors. It gives the students a chance to see another part of the world. All the community asks is that they go someplace where they can learn something. This year's class is planning on Hawaii, and will be expected to follow a cultural itinerary as well as enjoy the beach.

The Hamlet superintendent sees a different problem area in regard to the senior trip. A great deal of effort is made by each class to raise money for themselves, but no effort is made to raise money for the school. There are items which the school could use (but cannot afford) that might be provided by student fund raising -- a kind of civic responsibility in which students recognize their debt to the school and community. Such responsibility is thwarted by trips that require large sums of money.

Beyond High School

A fairly high percentage of Hamlet's students do not look beyond high school in terms of an education. Some just graduate and stay in town where there is not enough work. There is a great deal of concern about this attitude from all levels of the school community:

> Not a lot of my students have insights to higher horizons so that the fact they're missing something in terms of the world out

> there, there's not a high level of awareness of that. (from the superintendent)
>
> It's difficult to try and convince a kid to stay in school until he's twenty so he can get a diploma when the student says "What for? I'm going to work in the woods," or "I'm going to work at the mills, so what do I need a diploma for?" (from a teacher)
>
> A lot of these kids, they see their parents living on welfare, they think cleaning the town hall lobby is the only option that they feel is available to live here. (from a parent)

The class of 1985 was an exception; according to the guidance counselor, 85% of the students signed up for college, rather than the usual 20-25%. Of the 85% who signed up for college, 50% are still in school.

Approximately two-thirds of the students who go on to college go to state colleges, mostly for financial reasons. The SUNY Agriculture and Technical Colleges are popular, as is the local Community College in Slipperville. Although most of the students going to four year colleges attend SUNY colleges at Plattsburg, Potsdam, etc., Hamlet currently has a student at Hamilton, and students this year are considering Colby-Sawyer (in Maine) and St. Lawrence.

The guidance counselor expressed concern that not as many as they like stay in school. He blames this on the adjustment that students must face when they leave Hamlet for college. He points out that Hamlet is...

> One hundred miles from the nearest four year college. It's a little different. When you talk about college here, unless they have

> been there (a few of people here in town have been to college), they have no concept of a college.

The guidance counselor tries to minimize the adjustment factor by steering students into small four year schools or two year schools, at least to start. If they are interested in programs in large institutions (like Cornell) he encourages the students to look for similar programs in a small school. He believes that if students are "used to 10-12 kids in a class, in classes of 100-200 they have trouble."

A member of the junior class at Hamlet who would like to go to college sees a different reason why Hamlet students have trouble in college:

> A lot of people come out of our school as the valedictorian, salutatorian, and when they get into college they just can't make it because the teachers here really aren't strict enough. I mean, we think they're really hard on us, but like a couple of years ago, both the salutatorian and the valedictorian of their class ended up quitting college before they finished their first half-year, because it was too much for them to handle...back here they got excellent grades, they were two of the smartest girls that ever graduated from this school but they couldn't survive...Their grades were like D's, and back here they were excellent. And that's happened in a lot of classes. I guess back here we think they're really hard on us but I don't know if they prepare us all that well for college.

Several parents in the district expressed similar concerns.

Some other students, however, feel differently:

> Most of my friends are older kids that are graduated and in college now. When I talk to them, they're very happy, they really are.

They feel that they've been very well prepared.

It appears that, in the opinion of the Hamlet students, if the graduates are unsuccessful in college it is the school's fault; if the graduates are successful, that too is because of the education they received at Hamlet.

Overall, Hamlet appears to be a fairly stable small district. It is not facing any unusual financial crises, and politically there are only occasional challenges to the Board.

The main area Hamlet could improve in is its academic program.[2] Size is the major contributing factor in this, and an increase in size would most likely result in a broader program. Reorganization, the most obvious way Hamlet could increase its size, is discussed below.

Reorganization Possibilities in Hamlet

Hamlet Central appears to be a strong candidate for reorganization into a larger district. The benefits to be gained are substantial; also, unlike many other small districts considered ripe for reorganization, there are several viable merger options available to Hamlet.

The potential benefits can be divided into four categories:

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[2]Hamlet meets the minimal legal requirements, although it lacks some desirable subject areas (art and home economics).

programmatic, personnel, social and financial. Each category will be discussed below.

Programmatic Benefits

Research has shown that in small schools, as the high school enrollment increases, so does the number of courses offered. In his research on secondary school enrollment and curricular comprehensiveness, Monk (1986) found that for a high school with 100 pupils, an average of 45.65 different core courses[3] were offered. In high schools with 200 students, the number jumped to 57.80, while the figure for 300 pupils was 61.35. Hamlet, with 61 pupils, currently offers 25 courses in the core subject areas. If Hamlet were to reorganize with one of its closest neighbors the resulting high school would be between 225 and 300 pupils, and the number of high school courses available to Hamlet students would likely double. This is a substantial benefit.

Besides the additional course offerings reorganization would likely result in more sections of courses being available and fewer courses offered only once. Again, the figures are from Monk (1986):

Enrollment in Grades 9-12	Average # sections offered of each core course	Fraction of courses offered only once
100	1.48	.72
200	2.15	.51

[3]Core course offerings include these subject areas: English, foreign language (each treated as a separate subject area), mathematics, science, social studies, art and music.

300	2.68	.45

In Hamlet there is only one section of each course, although the English 11/12 Regents and 11/12 non-Regents courses might be considered two sections of English 11 and 12. The point, however, is clear: if Hamlet were to reorganize it is likely that some courses would be offered more than once, allowing students more flexibility in terms of time and staff.

Personnel Benefits

Monk (1986) also analyzed the assigments of teachers to their classes:

HIGH SCHOOL ENROLLMENT LEVELS AND
THE ASSIGNMENT OF TEACHERS TO CLASSES

9-12 Enrollment	Average # of Different Preparations For Full Year Classes for Each Teacher	Fraction of Full-Time Teachers Teaching Two or More Sections of the Same Course	Fraction of Full-Time Teachers Teaching Three or More Sections of the Same Course
100	3.34	.29	.13
200	2.73	.53	.28
300	2.27	.55	.39

These data show that as enrollments increase, teachers become more specialized. The number of different preparations per teacher decreases, as does the number of teachers teaching in more than one subject area. The fraction of teachers teaching multiple sections of a course increases.

Because there is only one section per course in Hamlet the number of preparations for teachers is equal to the number of courses they teach (usually six). The evidence suggests that if Hamlet became part of a larger district it is likely that the teachers would teach more than one section of fewer courses, thereby reducing the number of daily preparations.

From the teachers' perspective this could be viewed as a lessening of the work load. For the administration, there might be an advantage in recruiting teachers. Larger districts can support full-time teachers in areas such as art, foreign languages, and home economics; there is no need for teachers in these fields to be dual-certified in another field. Thus teaching positions are easier to fill.

Social Benefits

Some parents and teachers in Hamlet are quick to acknowledge the social benefits reorganization would bring, especially to high school students. The students, they feel, need to meet other young people. In the words of one teacher:

> I think it would make people worldly, and they would know there are other towns and there are other places, and that other schools are different.

Hamlet is a tight community, and these parents and faculty think the students need more exposure. They see reorganization into a larger district as one way to do that.

Financial Benefits

The financial benefits from reorganization would come mostly from a reduction in per pupil expenditures. Per pupil costs in grades 9-12 are currently over $7,000; the Board president feels that the Regents Action Plan could push that figure up to $10,000, making a year at Hamlet Central cost "almost as much as going to Harvard."

Savings could be realized here due to the economies of scale which would result from larger class sizes following reorganization. It should be noted that the per pupil expenditures of the districts Hamlet could merge with are substantially lower.

When discussing reorganization for Hamlet, it is important to note that there are several different combinations of districts possible. Hamlet's potential partners, identified by their geographic relationship to Hamlet, and approximate enrollments follow:

	north (of Hamlet)	130
	east	280
Southeast Central	southeast	600
Southwest Central	southwest	520

All of these districts are quite large geographically but much of the land is undeveloped forest; the populations are fairly concentrated. The school in Hamlet is seven miles from Southwest Central, 25 miles each from north and east. Southeast Central's buses actually drive past Hamlet Central to pick up Southeast Central students. Southeast Central's middle school is

about nine miles from Hamlet, with the high school about nine miles further.

Among our respondents, the most often cited reorganization option for Hamlet is a centralization with Southwest Central. It is closest to Hamlet, and there is some interaction between people in the two districts already. Hamlet residents shop, bank, buy gas, and eat out in the village the Southwest Central School is located in. The town and school in Hamlet sponsor an extensive ski program for Hamlet students at a ski area in the town. Young people from the two communities sometimes play on the same recreational baseball teams in the summer.

There is also some cooperation between the schools. BOCES students from both districts travel to Glenns Falls on the bus together everyday. The high school science teachers sometimes share chemicals. Until recently, a business teacher taught part-time at Hamlet and part-time in a BOCES program offered at Southwest Central. With this level of interaction existing between the two districts already, a Hamlet-Southwest Central centralization would seem logical for Hamlet.

Not so, according to the Hamlet Superintendent:

> There is a lot of sociological resistance to the Southwest Central alternative. This town and Southwest Central are separate for family reasons, good reasons; there would be resistance to going there.

Others in the school community do not hold that view. Several students felt that a merger with Southwest Central would work out. They acknowledge that a strong rivalry, usually

manifested in sports, currently exists between the two schools, and that sometimes fights break out between young people from the two communities. One high school junior described the relationship this way:

> We just argue over who's better in sports. We don't play them in sports, but we think we can beat them and they think they can beat us. Guys go over there and pick up girls and their guys come over here and pick up us girls. Just big fights all the way around.

But, overall, there is a sense of familiarity about Southwest Central for Hamlet. The community and the school are known quantities. Hamlet students (and their families) would be more comfortable going there than to other nearby districts. And Southwest Central, we were informed, would gladly take in the Hamlet district.

A second option for Hamlet would be to merge with Southeast Central. It is, as noted above, a little further away than Southwest Central, even though Southeast Central buses pass by Hamlet Central every day. It is highly unlikely, however, that either district would consider merging. The formation of the Southeast Central district in the 1970s was not a smooth process; people in Hamlet know that:

> I'd really hate to see it happen--I really would. Because, you know, you've sat back and you've watched what's happened at Southeast Central.... (from a parent)

> ...kids going to one school, shifting to other buses, and maybe going to another one and shifting around, and it's a horror. And I would, you know, hate to see that happen to my kid. (from a parent)

> They just ship them around. They didn't gain anything for their program. (from a teacher)
>
> They've had a terrible, terrible time and it's just been so publicly broadcasted about how bad a time that they had, that it's very difficult. (from a Board member)

Likewise, Southeast Central people are not interested in merging with Hamlet, or with anybody else. Their own reorganization was so traumatic that they do not want to go through it again. According to the Southeast Central Superintendent:

> On a survey that we did, that was an absolute no item, probably one of the biggest no's of all time. They're not interested in this again. They never want a fight started and they never want to have the telephones ringing again, brothers and sisters not speaking to each other, the emotionalism: they're over that. You ask them are we a better district for it, I think most people would tell you yes. But they never want to go through it again.

Both of the merger options described above involve schools considerably larger than Hamlet; most likely, Hamlet Central would close and send its students to the other district. A third option would be to maintain an elementary program and send out only the high school students. There are several ways this could be done: Hamlet could remain as a district and pay tuition for its high school students to another district, probably Southwest Central or Southeast Central; Hamlet could go through reorganization with one of those districts on the condition that

the new district continue to operate an elementary program at the Hamlet school (according to current law, such a condition could not be enforced); or several districts including Hamlet could establish a single central high school district, and retain authority over the separately organized elementary programs.

There is not much interest in paying tuition for the high school students. The district would have to maintain its own fleet of buses to transport the students. Also, the school building itself may be too large for just the elementary students. The financial benefits, if any, would not be substantial enough to compensate the community for the loss of the high school. Moreover, Hamlet would lose all formal influence over the program offered to their high school students. Currently there is no way to provide representation on school boards for communities sending students on a tuition basis.

There would also be problems if the district tried to reorganize on the condition that an elementary school remain in Hamlet. Again, the cost of operating the Hamlet physical plant would be high; also, if the educational needs of the new district changed, its ability to adapt would be hampered if it were committed to keep a building in Hamlet, no matter what.

The current superintendent in Hamlet would favor the development of a single high school for the Hamlet region. The logical location would be in the east area, minimizing the travel for all involved.

Judging from the material presented above, the case for reorganization in Hamlet is strong; although there are community members who feel that a merger with either Southwest Central or Southeast Central would not work out, both those options are viable if the community were to rally behind one of them. There are, however, several strong arguments that reorganization would be harmful to the Hamlet students and community. These will be discussed in the next section.

Reasons for Resisting Reorganization

In Hamlet, the school is very important part of the community, and the citizens are proud of their school. They are concerned that several of the programs they provide for the students would not continue after reorganization. Hamlet provides free lunch for all its students regardless of whether or not they would qualify for lunch under the federal program. The district pays for the students the federal government does not cover.

There are two other non-academic programs the community would not want to lose. One is the traditional senior class trip; the residents are proud of their ability to raise enough money to send the seniors on an exotic trip. The other program is the winter ski program that the school district cosponsors with the town of Hamlet. The equipment is stored at the school, Hamlet bus drivers volunteer their services to transport the

students to the ski area, and the district and town share the cost.

The two school districts that would be the most likely reorganization partners--Southwest Central and Southeast Central--do not have any similar programs, and the Hamlet residents know that.

The school is important to community members for their own use, also. The district funds a program for adults, offering such activities as shop, aerobics, typing, computer and volleyball. These programs are very important to the people, and susceptible to cancellation in a new district. The school custodian also points out that importance of the building for its:

> meeting ability, and its ability to house [people in] any major disaster or any problem that we might have; we can house probably 500 people in an emergency state.

In the words of the superintendent, the school serves as the "stickum in the sense that it holds the town together."

There are financial reasons why it makes sense for Hamlet residents to resist reorganization. Although the per pupil cost is high and expected to go higher, the taxes paid by Hamlet residents are quite low compared to the State average. Hamlet's full value tax rate is just over $14 per $1000, over 40% lower than the State average of $24. The Board president says there are many homeowners whose school tax bill is less than $350 a year; he figures he personally makes up in free lunches and transportation for his children what he pays in taxes.

The large property tax base is the reason for this. As mentioned above, there is over $205,000 in property wealth behind each pupil. Much of this land is owned by either the State or wealthy individuals who do not actually live in the district. Thus Hamlet residents are able to transfer a large portion of the school's cost to nonresidents. the $8,000-10,000 per pupil expense figure does not seem so ominous considering that the actual tax burden (several hundred dollars) on the residents is so small.

Both Southeast Central and Southwest Central are similar to Hamlet in that the State and nonresidents own much of the property but neither comes close to matching Hamlet's per pupil property wealth. Southeast Central's per pupil wealth is about $155,000, $50,000 less than Hamlet's, with Southwest Central's about $20,000 per pupil less than Southeast Central. Both districts already have higher tax rates. Thus any financial advantage Hamlet might receive from lower per pupil expenses, could be offset by lower per pupil property wealth and higher taxes. As long as Hamlet can export much of its tax burden, there is no strong financial reason to reorganize.

The reasons outlined above for resisting reorganization are based on nonacademic criteria. Proponents of reorganization would argue that these reasons are not important and that the main concern ought to be the education of the students. There are, however, several outstanding academic program areas at Hamlet that might actually suffer as a result of reorganization.

These program areas--science, special education, and computers--were described in some detail above. The possible negative effects of reorganization are described below.

Science Curriculum. As mentioned above, no other district in Hamlet's size range offers non-Regents chemistry and physics. According to Monk's research, no other district with less than 400 high school pupils offers non-Regents physics; and only 20% of the districts with more than 400 high school pupils offer non-Regents physics. Southeast Central offers non-Regents chemistry, which is rare (offered by 10% of the districts) for a district its size. Thus if Hamlet were to reorganize with another district and result with a high school of 200-300 pupils, Hamlet students would lose access to one, possibly two, science courses.

Special education. One of the reasons the mainstreaming process is successful at Hamlet is because the class size is so small: classroom teachers are able to give the special education students the extra attention they might need. The same is true for coaches and extracurricular advisors. If Hamlet were to reorganize, the resulting class size would probably be larger, lessening the amount of attention special education students would get in class.

Computers. Hamlet has made a substantial commitment to computer education for its students. Every classroom in the elementary grades has one, the mathematics classroom has several, and the school's computer lab has eight machines. Overall the student:computer ratio is 10:1, higher than that of its

neighbors. Also, Hamlet has a computer coordinator/instructor with a great deal of knowledge and experience in the computer field. Even if the computer coordinator were to assume that role in a reorganized district, it is likely that the number of students per machine would increase, thus reducing the amount of hands-on experience for students.

These reasons for resisting reorganization certainly merit consideration, although the overall case for reorganization is stronger. The benefits to reorganization, however, are not that compelling that the district ought to be put under any pressure to reorganize; the community must strongly support a reorganization in order for it to be successful. Allusions were made in section two to the reorganization that took place to form Southeast Central thirteen years ago; Hamlet residents are quite aware of the problems that district encountered and do not want to see them repeated in Hamlet. The following section describes the Southeast Central reorganization and the problems the new district faced, mostly as a result of weak community support.

The Southeast Central Reorganization and Its Aftermath

History

The Southeast Central School District was formed in 1973 when three districts voted to centralize. The notion of reorganization in this region of the State had been discussed for

many years. The current Southeast Central superintendent described the background of the Southeast Central reorganization in this way:

> At one time, the reorganization plans were going to include the school districts which now comprise Southeast Central and in addition to those there were four other districts. And they'd just about get the paperwork done on this, the reorganization, and one of the school districts would pull out. And then the rest of the school districts would say, "Well. let's go ahead with this." And they would go back and start all over again, make the adjustments and just about get ready and another would pull out. And this happened with all the school district except these three...

The process of developing a reorganization plan and then a district pulling out almost happened again. A movement began in one of the communities to dropout of the reorganization on the grounds that other districts had been allowed to dropout before. This time, however, the vote had been scheduled. According to the superintendent, residents in the community that wanted to drop out believe they were told by the State Education Department that each district voted separately, and if an individual district's votes turned down reorganization, their district would not be merged with the other two.

The law clearly stated otherwise. In a centralization the votes from the different districts are pooled and then counted. There is no way to know how an individual district's members voted. The overall vote for Southeast Central was close - 607 in favor to 482 opposed - and there are people in one community who adamantly believe that their district overwhelmingly rejected

reorganization and their district ought not be merged; they really believe they were told they would not have to if their district voted no. According to the current superintendent,

> There was mistrust and many yelled right from the beginning. They went down to the Commissioner's Office and tried to undo what they had done, to de-organize the schools. And they were told that once it's organized, that's it. And they felt even more that a conspiracy had been pulled on them.

This feeling of distrust and betrayal was fed by some of the early actions of the new district undertook; a Board member who was voted into office just after the reorganization recounts:

> Prior to consolidation the suggestion of the formal Boards was to do additions. Well, after the new Board was seated they started to look into what it would cost to do that vs. a new building. To us it did not seem feasible or practical [to do additions]. There was absolutely no way in this whole blue sky of convincing the people that that was the right way to go, "because you told us before you reorganized that we would not have a new building program."

A middle school teacher adds:

> It promised that K, 1, and 2 would stay in their respective buildings. It's not that way anymore. K, 1, and 2 are all moved, all at one school now. There are people in the district who went back and said, "You know, you promised us that we would always have [K, 1, and 2]."

This was, according to several members of the community, due to a lack of leadership going into the reorganization; the current high school principal states:

> One of the things a long, long, time ago that I was basically concerned with was the leadership going into consolidation and the background being laid for it... the people

> were not prepared for it, there was too much opposition.

Another teacher adds:

> I wouldn't put it at any particular doorstep, except to say there was no strong, clear leadership anywhere from the teachers' union or from the Board or from the Administration; nothing that the other groups could say, "Okay, we'll get behind this."

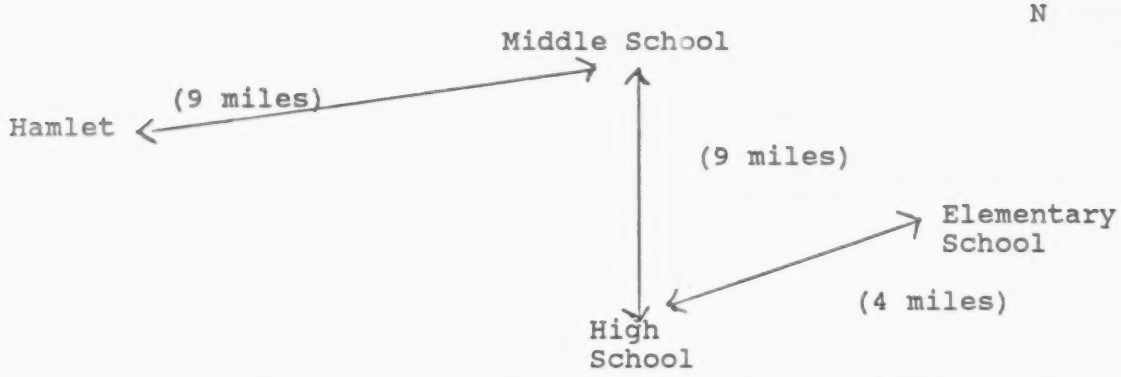
This combination of a close vote, a sense of betrayal, and lack of leadership affected the new district for a long time. During the next ten years or so the district did not come together very well and there were very strong rivalries amongst the component districts. Five separate building proposals, ranging from an entirely new school to major renovations to one or more of the existing structures were turned down; one of those included a $250,000 outright grant. Some people could not believe it was a grant, others could not agree on how the money should be spent. As a result the voters turned down the $250,000.

Members of the community, school teachers, and students blame the defeat of all these proposals on the three communities' unwillingness to spend money on a building in one of the other communities, or on a new building anywhere. As a result Southeast Central's eligibility for building aid expired without any major (or minor, such as adjusting the heights of blackboards when the classroom use changed) building renovations being made.

Thus, the three buildings remained in use. The smallest building became an elementary school and housed grades K-3. The

building in the community most opposed to the reorganization (or most vocal in its opposition) was used as a middle school with grades 4-8. The third building, in the largest of the communities, became the high school.

Geographically, the relationship between the three schools is as follows:



As the current superintendent tells it, transportation in the new district was problematic:

> The busing system consisted of coming right off the road to the high school, dropping off the high school students, going to the middle school, dropping off those students, coming to this building, [elementary school], dropping off those students, and then back to the bus barn. And at night the reverse process - or the same process because the middle school kids were the last ones to get here they are now the last ones picked up. So the buses come out of the garage, pick up the high school kids, come over here and pick up these kids, go to the middle school and pick those kids, and then on home. The middle school geographically is at the northernmost end of the district and is not centrally located. So we ended up with kids in kindergarten who were less than six miles from their house board at twenty minutes to three and getting home at four-thirty. That was the logistics of busing. That didn't

> please anybody. And you try to tell them that you are better off, you should've consolidated.

Another effect of the reorganization was the dismantling of cafeteria programs in all three schools. Immediately following the merger, the district was operating three separate cafeterias. The cost of keeping three facilities and three staffs was more than the revenue generated from the sale of lunches; the district had to contribute approximately $70,000 a year to operate the cafeterias. The voters objected to the expense and refused to pass a budget with funds for the cafeteria; as a result the cafeterias were closed, the equipment sold, and all elementary and middle school students had to bring cold lunches. High school students could either bring their lunch or leave the school and eat in one of the local restaurants.

The Academic Program

One of the alleged benefits of the Southeast Central centralization was the expected increase in courses available, particularly for high school students. When the district was first formed there was a total of approximately 900 students; during the late 1970's there was a precipitous drop off in enrollment. As a result the anticipated gains were not as great as they would have been if enrollment did not decline. Critics of the reorganization failed to take into consideration the fact that the enrollment would have dropped off anyway, and the results could have been quite severe in the individual districts.

It is not possible to know what the academic program would have been in the individual districts if the reorganization had not taken place. It is, however, possible to get some idea of what the reorganization brought to the academic program. Hamlet is approximately the size of each of the districts that joined to form Southeast Central. By comparing Hamlet's and Southeast Central's course offerings it is possible to speculate as to the advantages gained by the small districts that formed Southeast Central, and at the same time see some of the potential gains for Hamlet if it were to merge.

COMPARISON OF THE NUMBER OF COURSE FOR GRADES 9-12

	Hamlet	Southeast Central
9-12 Enrollment	61	195
English	4	4
Social Studies	4	4
Mathematics	5	7
French	4	3
Art	0	5
Music	4	6
Business	6	10
Science	4	6
Computer	1	1
Industrial Arts	6	4
Home Economics	0	0
Total	38	54

Some explanations are necessary. In French, Hamlet offers four courses but only three classes. The most advanced level is an independent study. In science, Hamlet students have seven courses available to them over the four years of high school but

only four are offered in any given year. The six Southeast Central science courses are offered every year.

The major difference in the two programs is not the number of courses but the number of sections of courses. Hamlet offers only one section of each course while Southeast Central offers two or three sections of all English and social studies courses, and two or three sections of most math, science, and French classes. In the more specialized areas such as art and vocational education, Southeast Central offers only one section of most courses, although several business courses of wider interest (such as keyboarding) are offered more than once a day. In Southeast Central, there is more flexibility for students in terms of time and staff than there is in Hamlet; it is also likely the students have more flexibility than they would if the component school districts of Southeast Central had not reorganized.

There are many faculty members who were teaching in one of the component districts before the merger; almost all think that, academically, it was the right thing do to. One of those is the current middle school science teacher, who previously taught seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth grade science every year and Regents chemistry or physics every other year. He found it difficult to give any specialized attention, and with only four or six students per class he did not get much input from the students.

He also felt it was harmful to the students to be in so small a school:

> It was very easy to be a big fish in a small pond, it was very easy for a mediocre kid to look good on a basketball court when there weren't that many other kids to compete with in getting on the team. It was very easy for a mediocre kid to look good in a class when there are not many other kids to compete with.

Thus the effects on the following reorganization were mixed: transportation and lunch became more problematic, but the academic offerings expanded.

Administration

Administrative positions of the newly reorganized districts were filled by the superintendents of the component districts. One of the superintendents became the superintendent of the new district, another became elementary principal; the third retired. Six years ago the superintendent retired and the Board hired a replacement from outside of the area. It turned out to be the move that began pulling the district together. One of the new superintendent's first actions was to push hard for the passage of a budget related proposal. One of the reorganization's strongest opponents was working against the proposal and a great deal of campaigning was done on both sides. The superintendent prevailed, thus setting himself up as the leader of the Southeast Central district.

The new superintendent was unsuccessful, however, when it came to building renovations. He was unable to get a budget passed that included $100,000 for repairs and renovations to the

elementary building. Over the course of several years, the renovations were made with much of the work being done by the custodial staff.

He was also able to alleviate the transportation system somewhat. One reason for the problem described above was that "shuttle buses" which could have been used to simplify the process were not aided financially by the state, and Southeast Central did not have the financial resources to pay for them alone. When the superintendent arrived he examined the law very closely and discovered that Southeast Central could work around it. A "shuttle" is narrowly defined as a bus where students get on at Point A and off at Point B, with no stops in between, such as students getting on at the elementary school and off at the middle school. But if the bus stops and picks up someone in between, or if some students do not get off the bus at the middle school, the bus run is not a shuttle and therefore aidable. The superintendent, business manager, transportation director/head mechanic, and district clerk spent a great deal of time revising bus routes and have shortened the longest run within the district to 55 minutes, with most students spending substantially less time than that on the bus.

The superintendent sees himself as the instructional leader as well as the chief administrator of the district. He has worked hard to increase academic achievement at all levels, either bringing in outsiders or supporting his staff's efforts. Following are three examples, one from each school:

Elementary school. The superintendent brought in several faculty members from the State University system to work upon the teachers to develop a reading-language-arts program based on children's literature. The students read books instead of a basic reader, and teachers develop language arts exercises from the books. It is a great deal of work for the teachers, but they feel it is a better program and worth the work. As far as student achievement is concerned, it appears that the better students do not improve significantly, nor do they perform worse. The poorer students, however, have made significant improvements under the system.

Middle school. The former superintendent who stayed on as a principal was moved to the middle school. One day he and the superintendent were sitting in the superintendent's office, wondering how they could raise the achievement level at the junior high school. The principal went back to his office to think about it some more. A little later the superintendent called him on the phone and was a little confused when the principal answered the phone "The Middle School, Home of the Big two-oh" The "Big Two-oh" was a scheme the principal developed to reward students for raising their cumulative averages a total of 20 percentage points semester to semester. (Those with already high averages need to maintain an 85% or better to qualify.) Students who made the "Big Two-oh" would be honored at a ceremony and banquet and receive "Big Two-oh" memorabilia such as ski hats and pins. The costs would be borne by outside donations.

The "Big Two-oh" has been successful in encouraging students to raise their averages. The hope is that as "Big Two-oh'ers" move on to high school they will continue to improve their scores.

High school. The district has recently hired a new principal who has the strong support of the superintendent . One area where they would like to see improvement is in student's writing; a new English teacher specializing in work on improving that aspect of the curriculum.

The principal just completed his first year; further changes are expected down the road.

With the new superintendent some of the problems associated with reorganization began to die down. The transportation system was improved, the academic program was beginning to strengthen, but a major trouble area remained, the physical plant.

All three buildings were crowded with every possible space being used. Regents Action Plan requirements for additional courses at the junior high and high school level would cause even greater problems this coming year. The Board and superintendent decided it was again time to propose a building program for additions to the high school and middle school buildings. The $1.8 million proposal passed in May 1986 by a 2-1 margin. Finally, 13 years after the reorganization, the district was able to address its physical plant needs.

Although reorganization has lead to an increase in course offerings it has, until recently, also caused problems for

members of the district community. These problems have spilled over into the schools themselves. Rivalries amongst students from the different component districts prompted a basketball coach from a team in Southeast Central's league to comment that he would not worry if a fight broke out at a Southeast Central game - the Southeast students would beat each other up. Students spend more time on the bus and must provide their own lunch, all for the sake of a few more courses. Educators would rightly argue that the increase in the number of courses and sections of course significantly improves the educational opportunities for Southeast Central students and that makes all the hassles worthwhile. Thirteen years, however, is a long time for a school district to operate in a hostile environment; perhaps, as the high school principal suggests, if they had waited a few years and allowed more community support to build up, the transition would have been smoother.

Summary

Hamlet is a fortunate district in several respects. It has a strong tax base which is not dependent on a local industry; Hamlet's wealth is in its land. This allows the residents the luxury of operating a K-12 school for 187 pupils without overly burdening themselves.

Hamlet is also fortunate in that if it were to consider reorganization two readily available options are there for the

voters. (Although Southeast Central residents say they would not consider another reorganization, Hamlet might prove too attractive a partner with its large tax base and debt-free, up-to-code building.)

And the voters should consider those options. The benefits to the students in particular the academic and social benefits, outweigh all the drawbacks outlined in Section Three. There is no doubt Hamlet students would benefit from reorganization.

A caveat must be added to the above assertion, namely that students would benefit if the reorganization were to take place smoothly and with community support. The example of Southeast Central clearly shows that a reorganization with barely half the community supporting it could create more problems than it solves, especially in the short term (for Southeast Central, the short term lasted 13 years). The situation in Hamlet is not that bad that a controversial reorganization would necessarily bring improvements. Thus, the final conclusion of this case study is that the reorganizasiton of Hamlet should proceed if and only if there exists strong community support.

Reference

Monk, David H. (1986) "Secondary School Enrollment and Curriculum Comprehensiveness." Unpublished manuscript, Department of Education, Cornell University.